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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
3 April 1966

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED HEREIN IS NOT AUTHORIZED

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State Dept. review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

With demonstrations continuing in I Corps and elsewhere this weekend, Premier Ky indicated publicly today that the government would "retake" Da Nang by force. He refused to indicate when any troop movements would take place but said all transport aircraft are being held ready.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Operation LINCOLN has made contact with well-entrenched enemy forces near the Cambodian border (Para. 1). Operation ORANGE encountered sporadic small-arms fire south of Da Nang (Para. 2). Two US battalions are pressing Operation CIRCLE PINES northwest of Saigon (Para. 3). Operation JACK STAY uncovered what may be a VC headquarters area southeast of Saigon (Para. 4). ROK forces have been successful in the opening days of a search-and-destroy operation northwest of Qui Nhon (Para. 5). Fifteen B-52s yesterday bombed a suspected VC divisional headquarters northwest of Da Nang (Para. 6).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Following new demonstrations in Hue and Da Nang yesterday and a disorderly Buddhist demonstration in Saigon last night, Premier Ky indicated publicly today that the government would "retake" Da Nang by force; he refused to indicate any timing (Paras. 1-4). General Chieu has returned to Saigon after being temporarily detained by "struggle" forces in Hue (Para. 5). Saigon and Hue are quiet today, but demonstrations were reported in Da Nang and several towns of I and II Corps, and a counterdemonstration was held near Saigon (Paras. 6-7). A Tri Quang associate indicates that protests will continue until Buddhist demands concerning an assembly are met; he also indicated that the Buddhists hope to pressure the US into forcing Ky to make such concessions. (Para. 8).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Peking propaganda draws on recent developments in South Vietnam and on past Chinese successes against the Japanese to bolster Vietnamese Communists and to point out "vulnerabilities" of US position (Para. 1).

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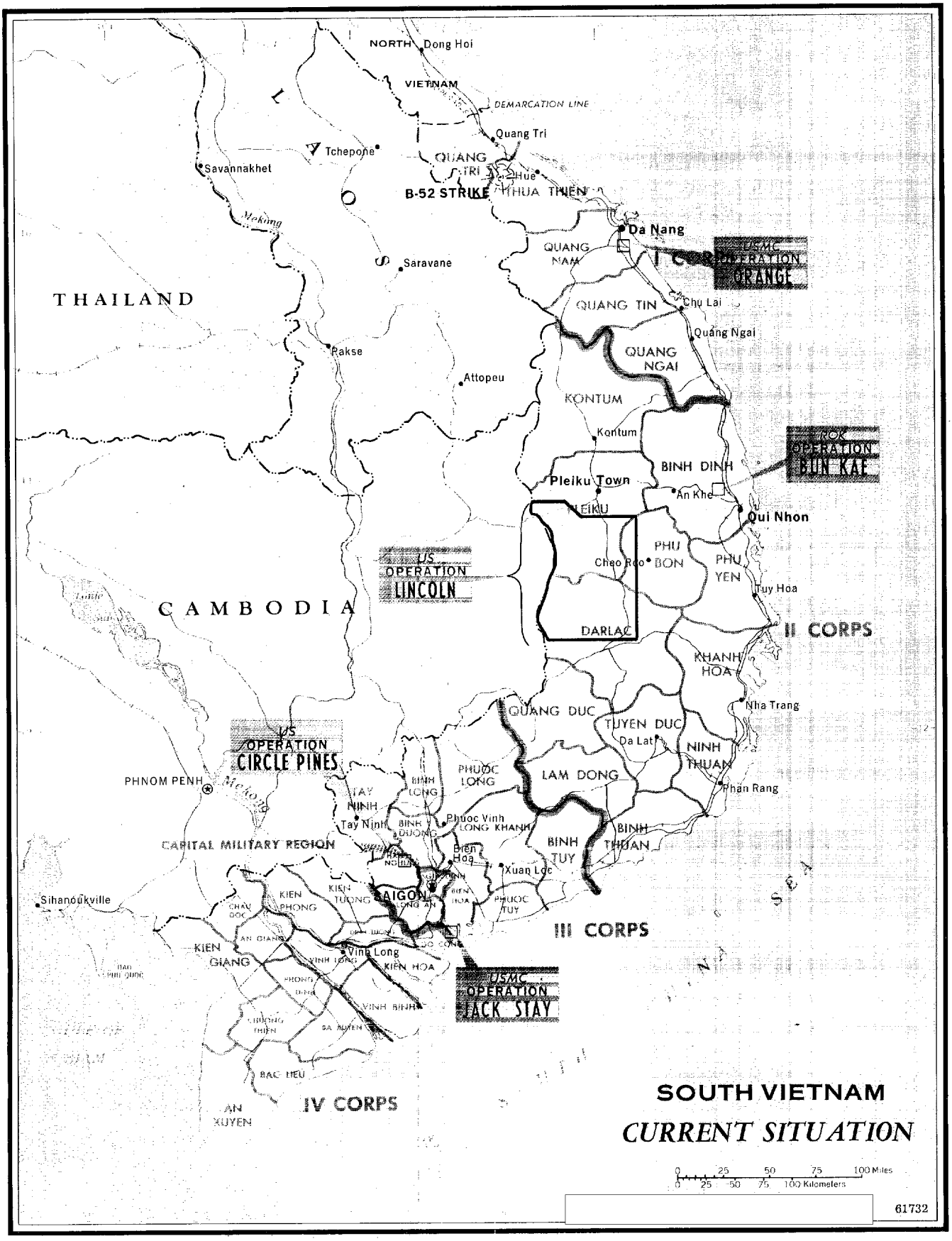

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The US forces involved in Operation LINCOLN, a search-and-destroy effort southwest of Pleiku, have made limited contact with the enemy during the past two days. Elements of the 25th Infantry Division on 1-2 April suffered some casualties as a result of fire from bunker positions located in the Cambodian border area, about 40 miles southwest of Pleiku. Since its inception on 24 March, this operation has accounted for 141 VC killed (body count) and six captured. US losses include 35 killed, 52 wounded and seven missing.

2. A recently mounted US Marine operation south of Da Nang, dubbed Operation ORANGE, ran into sporadic small arms fire yesterday as it pressed into enemy-held territory. VC losses during the three-day operation total 18 killed (body count) while US casualties include two killed and 45 wounded.

3. Northwest of Saigon, two battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division are continuing to press Operation CIRCLE PINES, a search-and-destroy mission launched on 28 March. In skirmishing yesterday, VC losses included 32 killed (body count) and one captured. US losses were eight killed and 32 wounded. Seven-day casualty totals for this operation are 74 VC killed (body count) as against US losses of 15 killed and 91 wounded.

4. Farther south, US marines participating in Operation JACK STAY today uncovered large VC installations about 20 miles southeast of Saigon. These installations, which include a large hospital, a mine factory, and classrooms, suggest that the marines may be moving into a major VC headquarters area. The VC have lost 57 killed (body count) in the ten days of this operation. US losses include five killed, 19 wounded, and one missing.

5. On 1 April, Republic of Korea (ROK) forces initiated a search-and-destroy operation--named BUN

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KAE 5--in Binh Dinh Province about 17 miles northwest of Qui Nhon. The Koreans have reported frequent contact with the enemy and claim to have killed 150 VC during the past three days as against ROK losses of 14 killed and 41 wounded.

6. Fifteen USAF B-52 Stratofortresses yesterday attacked a suspected VC divisional headquarters area about 75 miles northwest of Da Nang. Poststrike ground exploitation of the strike was not scheduled.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Following new political turbulence during the weekend--major demonstrations in Hue and Da Nang by troops and civil servants in direct defiance of government orders, and a disorderly demonstration in Saigon growing out of a Buddhist Institute meeting Saturday night--both the military Directorate and the Armed Forces Congress were convened in Saigon today to approve countermeasures.

2. Premier Ky, Chief of State Thieu, and other members of the Directorate held a press conference after the meetings and announced three broad measures. These were identified as the convening of a national political congress "to set up an assembly," the use of strong measures to restore peace and order in the country, and expressions of gratitude to friendly countries extending aid to South Vietnam. Premier Ky, in a 20-minute address, defended both his own policies and those of the US, citing figures on the number of Americans killed and wounded in defense of Vietnam last year.

3. Under questioning, Ky stated that he had suspended all flights out of Saigon to have planes available if the government needed to move troops, but he said he had as yet no definite plans for troop deployments. Later, however, he declared that the government would mount an operation to "retake" Da Nang, which he described as in the hands of the Communists. He also warned that the mayor of Da Nang, who was recently installed under General Thi, had been actively fomenting unrest and would be shot if apprehended. Ky refused to give any timing for the government's move, although he did assert that the convening of a political convention, to include representatives of all political parties, religions, and other groups, would take place within a week.

4. Ky's announcement regarding the retaking of Da Nang represents a shift in priority from Hue, earlier envisaged as the first target for the introduction of troops to re-assert government control. The change is believed to represent a judgment that the Hue situation is presently too volatile.

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The new I Corps commander, General Chuan, had earlier told US officials that there was a significant difference in the degree of popular support for the antigovernment movement in Hue and Da Nang. He reported that a majority of the people in Hue support the "struggle" movement because of the strong Buddhist influence in the city, whereas in Da Nang the Buddhists are divided and many merchants and workers oppose the movement or cooperate with it only out of fear. Yesterday's demonstration in Hue, moreover, drew heavily on troops from the ARVN 1st Division, indicating that the government cannot be assured of cooperation from local forces in the Hue area.

5. General Chieu, after being "seized" on Friday by local agitators in Hue to make a radiobroadcast and then returned to the residence of General Thi, was permitted to leave Hue yesterday and is now back in Saigon. He is reported to have met with General Thieu, presumably to report on his detention and his mission to try to obtain Thi's return to Saigon. Chieu's present status is unclear, but he was not among the generals at today's press conference. He was said to be "indisposed."

6. Both Hue and Saigon are apparently quiet today, although another 600-man police demonstration has been reported in Da Nang. Throughout the weekend, there has been a series of continuing protests in other towns of I and II Corps, including Quang Tri, Qui Nhon, Pleiku, Nha Trang, Ban Me Thuot, and Dalat. In the latter town, after sporadic resistance and counterplay, students have been permitted access to the local radio station and have successfully forced authorities to order US troops to evacuate one of the resort's main hotels. The new lady mayor of Dalat, after being removed from office and then reinstated, has reportedly left the town by air. Police units have moved into Dalat, however, and have orders to disperse any student demonstrators in evidence this evening.

7. There is some evidence of a developing reaction to the Buddhist-inspired antigovernment activity. Catholic youths today demonstrated against

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the Viet Cong and in support of the US at a town on the outskirts of Saigon, and leaflets attacking the Communists and the "struggle" movement have begun to appear in Saigon. There is still no firm evidence on the amount of Viet Cong involvement in the present antigovernment activity, although Vietnamese security officials have identified a small number of participants as probably Viet Cong, and reports continue to indicate Viet Cong efforts to infiltrate and exploit the antigovernment elements. [redacted]

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[redacted] demonstrators at Saturday night's Buddhist demonstration in Saigon shouted denunciations of moderate Buddhist Institute leader Tam Chau and slogans in favor of Ho Chi Minh. It is not known, however, whether this represented Viet Cong presence, defiance by Tri Quang followers, or government- or otherwise-inspired propaganda as part of a campaign to link Tri Quang with the Viet Cong.

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8. Thich Thien Minh, a close follower of Tri Quang, told an embassy officer over the weekend that protests would continue until the government agrees either to elections for a constituent assembly or to a constitutional committee formed entirely from present provincial and municipal councils. Minh also indicated that anti-American manifestations would cease if the US applied pressure on Ky to meet Buddhist demands.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Peking has seized on the current unrest in South Vietnam and terrorist actions in Saigon as the basis for its latest exhortation to the Viet Cong. A People's Daily article of 3 April draws on Mao and the Chinese experience against the Japanese to push the thesis that US defense installations and fortifications are vulnerable and that the "revolutionary masses of people" will eventually overwhelm enemy strongholds in the cities. The article refers to a number of past attacks on US bases in an effort to point out "weaknesses" of the US position in Vietnam. The article is also apparently aimed at answering any concern in the VC rank and file over recent allied military successes in South Vietnam, claiming that the Chinese eventually defeated the Japanese, despite all Japanese efforts to "blockade, partition, and encircle the liberated areas and destroy the revolutionary forces".

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